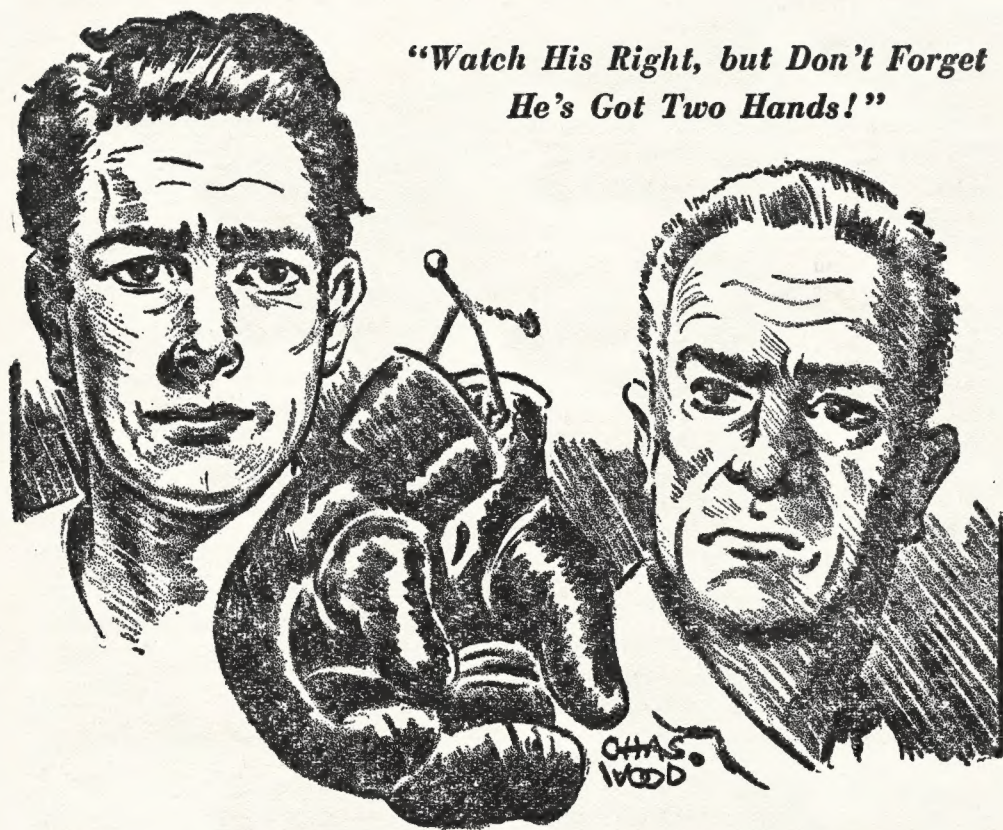


*"Watch His Right, but Don't Forget
He's Got Two Hands!"*



THE KID'S FIRST FIGHT

By JACK KARNEY

ON WINGED feet Joey took the steps up to the third-floor landing, pushed open the door of the apartment. His mother was rinsing a coffee cup and saucer at the sink.

"Joey?" she turned, squinting in the semi-darkness.

"I won, Ma," Joey tried to be nonchalant but the elation came up out of him in a surging wave. "Knocked him out in the second round. And look what I got!"

She came forward, soft brown eyes searching his face, noting the bruised lip, the red spot under the left eye.

"Oh, Joey, after what Dad said—"

The smile was gone. "I couldn't help it, Ma. See the watch. Gold. Seventeen jewels. It says so in the inside."

"It is pretty." For a second pride shone in her bony face, then she glanced at the closed bedroom door and suddenly lost all trace of expression. "You promised you'd stay away from fight clubs."

He lifted his shoulders, his eyes disturbed. "I couldn't help it, Ma. There was an opening in the card and this man asked who wants to fill in and before I knew it, I said okay."

She fingered the pocket watch, replaced it in the plush box, wiped dry fingers on the soiled smock, then wiped them again.

Joey said, "Maybe if I gave the watch to Dad, he wouldn't be sore, huh, Ma?"

Before she could answer the bedroom door opened and a short, stockily built man came out, the worn bathrobe snug around his shoulders. On the back of the robe the

faded red lettering spelled out, MIKE RIVERS. Scar tissue was heavy around his eyes. His right ear was a shriveled piece of flesh with a tiny hole. His nose was broken and spread unevenly over a punch-marked face. Standing in the doorway, Mike Rivers looked down at the watch in Joey's hand. There was a slow hardening to his lips as he walked into the kitchen.

Uncertainty in his manner, Joey shifted the watch to the other hand, looked at his mother for aid and comfort which was not forthcoming.

Joey said, the words spilling, "A watch, Dad, for you, I won it for you, Dad, here."

Mike Rivers' voice was tight, the words thin and sharp. "I asked you not to dirty yourself, but you didn't listen."

"But, Dad, it was only an amateur fight. It was fun, honest."

"Amateurs. Fun. Gold watches when you win; dollar fountain pens for a beating. Then one more step to the professionals, nickels and dimes to act as somebody's punching bag."

JOEY stared at his father. He knew there were words he'd left unsaid. I've given my life to boxing, his father forgot to say, I had no time to learn anything else. Seventeen years of it and look at me now, a washed up bum, a handler, trainer, a lobby-gow for fighters, anything to make a dollar to support the family.

Joey blurted out, "I like it, Dad. I like to put on the gloves and dance around and box with the fellers. I can't help it."

Mike Rivers' eyes narrowed. He said, clearly and swiftly, "I've asked you to listen to an older man who's been around but you got your own damn ideas. This time I'm not asking you. I'm ordering you never to lace on a glove. If you do—" His face muscles twitched.

Joey looked at him in fear and resentment. "Remember once you told me how you liked the feel of the canvas under your feet, the ropes rubbing against your back, the smell of the gym, the alcohol, the sweat, everything. That's how I feel, Dad. I don't know why—"

"Stay away from the gym!"

His cheeks a dull, smoldering red, Joey turned away. "I'll try, Dad. Honest to God, I'll try." Then he remembered the

watch, held it out. "For you, Dad, a present."

An angry spasm ran across the older man's face as he threw up his hands to push away Joey's hand. "I don't want it," he cried. The watch dropped out of the case to the bare floor, pieces of tinkling crystal scattered around it.

Joey stared down. Nobody spoke and the silence grew heavy. Abruptly Joey turned and went into his room, closing the door softly behind him.

His mother picked up the watch carefully, almost reverently. Mike Rivers drew a hand across his forehead in a tired gesture.

"I told him I didn't want it," he cried in self-defense. "Needn't look at me like that. Get it fixed. I'll give you the money for it. But you needn't tell Joey—" He went into his bedroom and she stared at the closed door, a troubled look on her thin face.

JOEY held Anne's hand as they walked along the waterfront and watched the seagulls swooping down to the river, their wings glistening silver in the setting sun. Anne was seventeen, one year younger than Joey, and just reached Joey's shoulder. Not pretty, she had candid blue eyes, and a softly rounded face that looked lost in the maze of red hair hanging around her shoulders.

They sat down in a stringpiece and watched the gang do tricks off the freight cars.

The leader did a swan dive and everyone followed, then they raced across the oil-stained water to the adjoining pier.

Joey looked across the river at the New York skyline.

She said, "Bet a penny I know what you are thinking about."

He pulled his eyes around, grinned. "Bet."

She said, "Madison Square Garden."

He laughed softly, "You know the words have a nice sound, like music or poetry. Madison Square Garden." He rolled the name around his tongue, enjoying it. "They got a big marquee out front, big bright lights you can see a mile away. Wouldn't it be funny if we walked past some day and saw Joey Rivers name up there?"

"You're not serious, Joey?"

"No," he said quickly. "Just make believe."

A tiny frown appeared between her pencilled eyebrows. "Suppose we just don't talk about it, Joey."

"Talking can't hurt."

"Maybe not. Joey, you've got a job to worry about—"

"Sixteen bucks a week," he said, no bitterness in his tone.

"My Dad says you'll get a raise soon."

He studied his palms. "What else does your father say?"

She flared up. "I don't know why you take that attitude, as if my Dad disliked you or something."

He grinned. "Or something."

She said, "Dad likes you. He said someday you'll be behind the counter with him instead of running errands. Maybe, someday, you'll be a partner in the business. My Dad said so, Joey."

He said sadly, "Why, because I'm Joey Rivers or because you and I will be married some day?"

"What's the difference? With Dad behind you, you've got a future. More of a future than in this prizefighting you're always talking about."

Anne's Dad had used the same words. "You're a fool, son. There's no future in prizefighting. You should learn a lesson from your father—"

THE swimmers came up on the pier, hopping around on one foot, then the other to get the water out of their ears. They said hello to Joey and Anne, milled around them.

They said, "When you boxin' again, Joey, huh? When you fightin' pro's? Two pro fights Blackie's won."

Blackie Martino came out of the water last. He blew his nose, shook water from his ears. Blackie, runner-up in the Golden Gloves, had won his two professional fights by knockouts. He saw Joey sitting with Anne and he scowled. Blackie was always scowling. As far back as Joey could remember, Blackie had made those funny faces.

Joey said, "I'm not boxin' any more, fellers. I'm retiring undefeated."

Blackie said, "Look a' him. One lousy amachoor fight. Maybe you're better off,

Joey. Chances are you'd wind up like your old man, listenin' to the bells in y' head."

Joey got up. "Blackie Martino, always shootin' off his big trap."

Blackie said easily, "A punchdrunk bum, that's your old man—"

Joey cried out something, moved in on Blackie who stepped back. Blackie said, "I get paid f' my fights. I ain't breakin' no knuckles on your head."

Anne grasped Joey's arm. "Please, Joey. Don't pay any attention to that loud mouth. Joey, please."

He sat down again, hot and shaken. "He can't talk about my father like that."

Blackie winked at the gang and the boys laughed. Blackie said, "Joey, maybe y' can take it out of my hide. Tomorrow in the gym you and me can slug it out with gloves. Okay? Or maybe you just talk tough?"

Miserable indecision held his tongue. He'd promised his Dad—

Anne said, "Don't pay any attention to him, Joey. Let's go home."

Blackie said, "No guts, eh?"

His eyes were bright, nostrils quivering. "Okay, tomorrow in the gym."

IT WAS Sunday afternoon and Wally's gym was crowded with boxers, their managers and trainers, with spectators who had paid thirty-five cents at the door for the privilege of watching the past, present and future greats go through their training chores.

After waiting their turn, blackie Martino and Joey climbed into the ring. The crowd moved to the other ring where the latest importation from England, a middleweight scheduled to fight the champ in September, was slipping his bandaged hands into twelve-ounce gloves.

Joey watched a handler cover Martino's face thickly with vaseline, slip the mouthpiece between his lips. Joey moved around impatiently in his sneakers, rolled his shoulders, shadow-boxed a few seconds.

At the bell Martino ripped into Joey's middle with ten-ounce gloves, forced him to grab and hold. In a clinch Martino roughed Joey around the ring, punished him inside, sent Joey sprawling with a leather bombardment. Near the end of the round Joey caught Martino going away and Blackie slipped to one knee. The crowd broke and

the boys had taken away half the Englishman's audience.

Joey tried to keep Martino off with a stiff left but the swarthy-faced Golden Glover came under it, threw punches from every angle. Then suddenly Joey was tired. His back against the ropes he tried to fight back but lead weights held his hands down, bands pressed around his chest, stopping his breathing. When the round ended Joey was slowly sinking to the canvas.

Blackie said, "One more round, Joey. C'mon, I'll take it easy."

Joey breathed deeply, shook his head. He hadn't done any training; he wasn't in condition.

Blackie taunted him. "Quittin', Joey?"

A low, dead voice said from ringside. "Joey's had enough. Get out of there, Joey."

Joey's stomach tightened into a sickening knot. He shook off the gloves, climbed out of the ring. His eyes met his father's, slanted off.

Mike Rivers said, a sudden edge to his voice, "You and your promises."

Joey drew his mouth down across his teeth, not answering.

Mike Rivers cried, "I'm talking to you."

Compelled by the roughness in his father's voice, Joey turned, faced him squarely. Joey said, "I had to fight him, Dad." He drew his fist across his lips and it came away red. "I couldn't back out."

Mike Rivers said, "It's been a long time since I licked you. Tonight I'm either gonna make you listen to me or—" he stopped.

Joey began to move away in a half-daze. Suddenly he turned, his chin sticking out stubbornly. "Better make the licking a good one because what I said about never putting on gloves again don't count. Up there in that ring I made my mind up, I'm gonna fight in the pro's."

"I'll beat that out of you."

"It'll take a lot of beating, Dad."

"Get dressed and go home!"

Joey went into the dressing room, removed his strips, stretched out on the table to rest. After a while, a tall gray-haired man came in. Joey knew Whitey Davis, who'd handled Mike Rivers and was now scheduled to be in the Champ's corner in September.

"Hi, kid," Whitey said, grinning.

"Blackie give you a nice workout?" He leaned over to examine the bruises on Joey's face. "You'll be okay. What you wanna go into the ring with Blackie for? For that matter, why monkey around with gloves at all? Take it from me, kid, I've been around here a long time and a smart kid like you don't belong in this lousy racket."

Joey said, "Mike send you to give me that spiel?"

Whitey shook his head. "It was my own idea."

"Whitey, I wanna be a great fighter, a champ, maybe. Is that a crime?"

WHITEY stared down into the boy's eyes. He could see the fire in the eyes, the fever that was pushing this boy on with the business of acquiring greatness.

Whitey said, "Look, Joey, thousands of kids like yourself become fighters, each with the bug in his noodle that he'll be a Champ. Only there ain't enough crowns to satisfy everybody. Only a handful get up on top. Why? Because they got the stuff? Maybe. Or maybe it's because they got good managers who know the ropes, managers with good connections. Guess I'm talking to myself. Go take your shower, kid, you'll catch cold."

Whitey paced the floor and when Joey came out, a towel draped over his shoulders, he'd decided on a new course of action. "Kid, you was right the first time. Your old man sent me in to maybe talk you out of it. He's a great guy, your old man, the nicest guy in the world. You're his kid and it's for your own good—"

"I know all that," Joey said, then grinning, "What you gonna do with a dumb kid who doesn't know the score?"

Whitey shrugged with his hands and shoulders. "That's how it is, I guess. What about your job?"

"As soon as I get my first fight, I start training and to hell with the job."

Whitey went outside to where Mike Rivers was helping a young colored boy go through his calisthenics.

Whitey said, "No use, Mike. Hell, why not let the kid fight?"

Anger in his face, Mike Rivers said, "Sure I'll let him fight. Why not?"

The river looked crinkled in the moonlight. The sky was a tranquil limpid

blue. Anne and Joey sat on the stringpiece listening to the pleasant drones of sound made by a tugboat maneuvering a freighter between piers.

Anne said, "It's late, Joey, I'd better go home."

An echo of bitterness under his tone, he said, "Before your father comes looking for you with the whip."

"That isn't fair." She tossed her head angrily. "My father isn't entirely wrong, you know. You can't just throw up your job and expect—"

"I did; that's that."

"You'll never be anybody, my father said. Flittering your time away in the gym. Maybe he's right."

He faced her squarely, trying desperately to conceal the turmoil going on inside him. "Tomorrow night, I box my first pro fight. I'll win it. I know I will. That's all I need, this one fight under my belt, and I'm on my way. Anne, change your mind, come see me box tomorrow night. I've got a ticket for you—"

She drew her eyes away. "I told you; my Dad ordered me not to go."

His face looked wan and drawn. "He's good with them orders."

"He also ordered me not to see you again."

"And?"

She didn't answer for a while then her eyes swept his face. "I couldn't do that, Joey. I love you too much." Then she was sobbing softly.

A STRAY dog sniffed at his shoes and limped away. A gang of boys, singing camp songs, came onto the pier and found seats in the corner near the heavy pilings.

Joey took a black rubber ball out of his pocket, squeezed it, abruptly flung it so far out into the darkness he didn't hear the splash.

"Don't be angry with me, Joey," she pleaded.

He shook his head. "It isn't you. Just that everybody and everything keeps slapping me down. You can't do what you wanna do, they say, we won't let you."

She took his hand in hers. A kind of radiance shone in her face. "You'll win tomorrow, Joey. You'll show them. I'll pray for you, Joey." She leaned forward,

kissed him. Before he could put his arms around her, she was gone.

JOEY took one last look around to see if he had all his stuff for the fight, snapped shut the battered valise and came out into the kitchen. His father looked up, stared at him with the impersonal eyes of a stranger, turned back to his newspaper spread before him on the table.

His mother came away from the sink, smiled weakly. "You're going, Joey."

"Yeh, Ma. It's getting kind of late."

"I'll get my hat and go with you."

Mike Rivers' head came around in a slow stiff turn. Coldly, he said, "You're not going any place."

"Joey needs someone," she began.

Joey said quickly, "It's okay, Ma. You don't have to worry about me." He gave her hand a reassuring squeeze. "I'll do all right. Heck, if I knew you were there I'd be thinking about you and I couldn't fight my fight."

"You're sure, Joey—"

"Sure. Wish me luck, Ma."

She kissed his cheek, and without looking at his father, he went out, the patched valise knocking against the closing door.

Eyes cold and lusterless, she said, "Mike, you should be with him."

The newspaper rustled.

"Why didn't you go with him?"

A muscle quivered in his throat but he said nothing.

"Remember your first fight, Mike? I was the only one there who knew you. You told me how my presence alone gave you the necessary lift to win."

He crushed the newspaper, flung it aside. His lips looked dry and there was a sickness in his eyes.

"I wish to God you hadn't been there. I wish I'd lost and quit. Then maybe today I'd be somebody with a decent job. Joey isn't going to wind up like me. Tonight he'll see what it feels like to take a beating from a professional fighter. Blackie Martino will knock some sense into him."

"Blackie Martino? Is that who—? But Blackie's won his last two fights; he's had years of experience in the amateurs."

The words jumped from his mouth, impatient, staccato. "That's why I had Whitey match Martino with Joey; he'll get such a

beating all the fight will be knocked out of him and he'll quit."

"Mike, you couldn't—"

"It's for his own good. Damn it, you think I'm enjoying this?"

He turned on his heel and went into his bedroom. She followed and found him sitting on the bed, his head in his hands.

"Mike," she said softly, "go to him, help him."

"It's no good," he said wearily, "one beating and he'll quit. It's got to be that way."

A sob escaped her lips. "Joey'll never quit."

He looked up. "He's got to, he's got to get out of this stinking racket."

"Joey is you, Mike, the same blood, the same instinct to fight and fight—"

"No." Sweat dampened his forehead.

"Yes, Mike." Relentlessly, she said, "You wouldn't quit, win or lose. Joey is like that. In your heart you know it." She saw the vague fears in his eyes rolling into sober conviction. She said, "You say you don't want Joey to wind up like you. But he will, because, like you, he's got nobody to help him over the rough spots, nobody to advise him. Look in the mirror, Mike, and see how Joey'll look in fifteen years."

"No! God help him, no!"

"Yes, Mike. What are you going to do about it?"

He got up on shaky legs. "Gotta walk," he said. "I can't think straight."

JOEY smiled stiffly as he walked down the aisle, the flapping of the faded robe against his legs pacing the pounding inside him. He looked at the spectators lounging lazily in their seats and he felt heavy and clumsy, scared. The lower strand tripped him and somebody at ringside laughed.

Scuffing his sneakers through the rosin he noted the mass of empty seats. Around the third bout of the evening the seats would be full, Joey knew. Why waste time watching a couple of prelim kids when the fans could have a more enjoyable time out in the lobby chewing the fat, puffing black smoke into the other guy's face? His father used to tell him about the real fan up in the balcony. Thinking of his father brought a pang to his heart. Suddenly he felt chilled.

Whitey said, "You'll be okay, kid. Dempsey, Tunney, they used to get the heeby-jeebies before a fight."

Joey smiled gratefully.

The gong clamored for silence but the noise continued. The sing-song voice of the announcer informed the crowd of the name, weight and the district of each boxer in the opening four round contest of the evening. There was applause and a couple whistles from up in the balcony. Some of the gang, Joey thought.

"C'mon, kid," Whitey said and they went to the center of the ring under the heavy lights to listen to the referee's instructions. Joey tried to concentrate but Blackie Martino's smugly smiling face distracted him. Back in his corner, Joey slipped out of the robe.

One last word of encouragement by Whitey, then the gong, loud and clear.

Martino met Joey in the center of the ring and without any loss of time, pumped both hands to the head. Joey lashed back, missed, caught a left and right to the head that forced him to grab and hold desperately. There was a singing in his head and already he felt tired. Weeks of preparation in the gym and it took just a few solid punches to drain all the energy out of him. Martino whispered in Joey's ear, silly, obscene words, then punished Joey inside with tricks he'd picked up in his comparatively long career.

Martino swarmed over him and the crowd, sensing a knockout, became interested. Joey fought back desperately but Martino was a perpetual motion machine, stopping only when the referee stepped between them. Martino hooked his left, crossed his right and Joey went down on one knee. Before the timekeeper could start his count Joey got up only to be dropped by a rain of blows. This time Joey saw Whitey's frantic signal to stay down. At eight Whitey lifted his palms. Joey got up, grateful for the second it took the referee to wipe the rosin from the gloves on his gray shirt. Martino rushed across the ring, fainted Joey out of position with a left, put all his weight behind a whistling right hand. Joey went down just as the bell rang.

Whitey worked on Joey, talked to him even while he massaged new life into the

fluttering muscles. Fresh cotton in his mouth, Joey went out for the second round.

They traded light taps in the center of the ring, then Martino came under fast, heaved leather to the body, switched his attack to the head. Joey went back on his heels, ugly lights dancing before his blurred eyes. Martino measured him, his right came thundering. Joey grasped the top strand to keep from falling. Martino cursed him, spit disgustedly, shuffled closer. In a sudden frenzy of new energy Joey sent him back with a wild bombardment. Martino laughed and the crowd laughed with him. Bobbing and weaving, Martino moved in, rocked Joey with a two-fisted attack. Joey went down with a dull thud.

At first he didn't hear anything except for that constant roar in his head, as if a train was going through the tunnel of his brain. His vision cleared and he saw the referee's hand slice the air before his eyes. He heard, six, seven, eight. He pulled himself up with the aid of the middle rope. Martino gave him no respite, pounding, pounding. In sheer desperation Joey struck back, connected. Martino stopped in his tracks, surprise etched in his swarthy face. Joey's legs were unsteady as he followed up, throwing brownish leather from every angle. Joey never saw the punch but suddenly he was down on his hands and knees and big red spots were soiling the canvas. He was there when the bell rang.

MIKE RIVERS stood in the rear of the arena, watching the fight. Sweat dotted his forehead, and his face was gray as ashes. At the end of the first round he'd gone half-way down the aisle. The kid needed help, his kid—he walked back. Just a couple more rounds, he'd thought, and it'll be over. He'll never quit, his wife had said, never, never, never.

His kid had stuff, lots of stuff for a beginner. He carried his left too low and he had a habit of throwing his right from the hip. His feet had music, good, strong feet, clear eyes. Guts, plenty of heart. C'mon, Joey, get under, work on the belly. The kid had a fair left, if only he'd put some weight behind it.

Mike Rivers rolled with every punch, winced as Joey went down. Stay down, Joey. Let's get it over with, down, Joey—

Damn fool—You can't win—Joey, you damn stubborn kid—

Suddenly Mike Rivers was going down the aisle, climbing up the stairs into the ring. Joey was leaning back on his stool, eyes closed, relaxing with utter weariness. Whitey was working on the cut over the left eye.

"Joey, listen to me."

Joey's eyes flew open. "Dad!" There was a curious ache in his throat. "I'm not doing so hot, huh, Dad."

"Let me do the talking. Stay away from Martino. Box him, you got the reach, watch his right hand; he's got to wind up before he throws it. He starts to wind up, let your left hook go with everything you got." He looked up impatiently at the warning whistle. "You got it straight? Stay out of clinches, don't let him wind up his right hand." He slapped Joey's shoulders just as the bell rang. "You can take that bum, Joey."

He sat on the steps and watched the fight. Look at the kid waltz around! C'mon, Joey, stick out that left. The kid had class written all over him. I used to look classy too and look what happened. But it isn't going to happen to my boy, not to Joey. I'll see to that. Once he's made his pile I'll make him quit. While he still has his health and brain. A vague uneasiness disturbed him. Suppose the kid, like Mike Rivers, couldn't quit the game until—until it was too late?

Joey, for the first time that night felt free and easy. Martino tried to work his way inside to explode his bombs but Joey kept him off balance with a straight left. Then Joey saw it; Martino made a peculiar motion with his right hand, let it go. Joey caught the glove on his arm. Martino said something. Joey laughed.

"C'mon, you bum," Joey said. "C'mon and fight."

He stepped in quickly, hooked his left just as Martino began to wind up. Martino slammed against the ropes, his mouth open, exposing the pale pink mouthpiece. Joey followed, his eyes on Martino's right hand, waiting. He never saw the left. Suddenly he was reeling back and a human dynamo was pouring blows on him. Joey bobbed and weaved, his arms covering his face. Now he was down and the bell rang again and again over the noisy crowd.

Joey returned to his corner with his father's help. Whitey doused him with cool water, ran the sponge over his face, squeezed more water onto his head.

MIKE RIVERS said, "You can't get careless like that, not with Martino. Watch his right but don't forget he's got two hands. You caught him once with a left hook and you can do it again, only this time put some muscle behind it. Get that left shoulder up a little higher and Martino can pickle his right hand. C'mon, Joey, take him. This is your big fight—"

Both boys touched gloves and the referee stepped aside. Martino stabbed with his left twice. Joey pushed it aside once, caught it the second time. Again that left then the right making a half-circle. Joey's left came around. Martino's mouthpiece sailed out of his mouth half across the ring. Angrily, Martino fought back. Joey tied him up and, before Martino could begin his body attack, pushed him away. Snarling something, Martino tried a one-two punch. Joey let the left hand ride, then his own came around in a short arc. Martino went down.

In a neutral corner Joey looked out at the crowd, wondered at their sudden change in affection. A few minutes ago they'd

pleaded with Martino to end the fight, now they were cheering Joey. The boxing fan is a crazy guy, his father had once said, he wants to see blood and he doesn't particularly care whose.

Martino was up. Joey was across the canvas in a few steps, backed Martino into a neutral corner, blasted him down with two straight hooks to the head, then trotted to a neutral corner.

At the count of ten, Mike Rivers came out to meet Joey, his eyes bright. "Good fight, Joey. You're on your way."

Joey said questioningly, "You and me, Dad?"

"You and me and Whitey."

Joey's lips quivered. He tried to talk but he couldn't. He wanted to tell his Dad how with the money he'd get for this fight he could get a chain to go with that watch he'd won in the amateurs.

TWO years and six months later New York's favorite columnist said: Hottest rumor on the Beach is that Joey Rivers, newly crowned Champ, is burning his gloves. After his marriage to the pretty Anne Wallace, the rumor says, Joey is going into the poultry business with his Dad and manager, Mike Rivers. Joey Rivers retiring? Wanna bet?

ALL HE WANTED was to dig a well—a water well—for the only girl in the world.

ALL THE REST of the population was interested only in oil—which traditionally doesn't mix with water.



"The Master of Dead Man's Dome"

A novelette in our next issue by

DEE LINFORD